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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching and learning in which students assess their own strengths and weaknesses and apply the concept of interdisciplinary study to improve their academic performance is described. An example is given of developing mathematics skills along with the companionship tools of reading effectiveness and comprehension of math problems, writing, and speech precision and clarity. The instructor helps students to form an individual self improvement program (SIP) by requiring them to identify the topic of their SIP, write a clear, concise purpose, and delineate a minimum of five objectives they wish to attain. The purpose of the SIP is to help students make connections between what they learn in various subject areas and to understand the relationship between academic learning and actual life practices. While this interdisciplinary approach has been most successful at the college level, it is possible to adapt it for use at the secondary and elementary level. (JD)

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INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING AND LEARNING:
An Individually Guided Approach To Education

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INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING AND LEARNING:
An Individually Guided Approach To Education

This article presents an approach to teaching and learning which has proven to be quite successful on the university level. The approach is labeled "Interdisciplinary Teaching And Learning - An Individually Guided Approach To Education". This label is most appropriately applied because students are able to engage in the exploration of learning and the development of skills across discipline lines. The instructor becomes more of a generalist, in some instances, and is able to aid in facilitating student learning in diverse areas. This approach is commonly practiced by some teachers. For example, there are a number of mathematics teachers who emphasize the development of mathematical skills alongside the companionship tools of reading effectiveness and comprehension of math problems, writing and speech precision and clarity. The teacher, ultimately, recognizes the importance of each area in a student's mathematical skills development, aptitude and performance effectiveness.

The title of the course which permits this kind of teaching/learning flexibility is "Fundamentals of Cross Cultural Communication". The course title is not of essential importance: What is essential, however, is the approach that is used and its adaptability to the elementary and secondary school curriculum.

Background Information on the Course

Fundamentals of Cross Cultural Communication is a course which allows students the opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses and to work towards converting the weaknesses into strengths. This simple goal is flexible enough to allow students a chance to identify a weakness that is most critical. The weakness may be in any subject area. Mathematics, English, biological science are only a few subjects in which students may be having difficulty. If the student identifies having difficulty with percentages in math, comprehension rate in reading, subject-verb agreement in English, or the nervous system in biological science, then he is expected to illustrate how the improvement in a chosen area relates to his self improvement. The student then proceeds to develop his Self Improvement Program under the direction and supervision of the instructor.

The course is developed in three phases. Phase one explores the theories and concepts of cross cultural communication presented in the required textbook. The second phase focuses on the application of theories and concepts as presented in two pocketbooks of required readings for the class. The third phase of the course is the presentation to the class an oral presentation of the completed self improvement program (hereafter referred to as SIP). A paper-overview of the SIP is also submitted to the instructor.

The Individually Guided Approach to Education (SIP) is continuous and on-going from the first day of class. Students are given some basic guidelines about how they may proceed in the development of their SIP with the

flexibility to modify and tailor the guidelines to their needs. It is believed that students feel more comfortable in the beginning stages of their SIPs if they have some guidelines and suggestions of ways to proceed.

The SIP can be used to explore a wide range of areas and concerns. Students may select their concerns from a continuum which ranges from personal concerns to international concerns. The student may also consider socio-personal strengths and weaknesses, subject matter strengths and weaknesses, and international strengths and weaknesses. The area for exploration is vast and all possibilities are open to students to explore.

It is assumed that if students select their weakness areas that they would be more devoted to converting those weaknesses into strengths. Also, it is important that students proceed through the progressive stages of the SIP from the first week of class simultaneously as they work through their traditionally structured part of the course. The SIP is the only part of the course that allows for independent study and individuation.

During the first week of school the instructor presents a lecture on "Developing the Self Improvement Program". She indicates that students should identify and select from their list of weaknesses an area to work on developing during the semester. After the weakness-area-for-research has been identified, students are to do the following:

.Identify the topic of the SIP

.Write a clear, concise purpose of the SIP

.Write a minimum of five objectives for the SIP

After the above steps have been completed, the instructor sets up appointments

with all students individually and helps them to further conceptualize and refine their programs. Then, the students proceed (under instructor supervision) with the following:

.A review of the literature

.Listing of the learning experiences to help meet the objectives

.Development of a pre and post assessment to determine their levels of growth

.Administer the pre assessment

.Implement the SIP for two-three weeks

.Take post assessment

.Critique the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the program

The SIP allows students the opportunity to develop their programs, to implement them, to write a paper overview, and to present their SIPs to the class.

The written overview of the SIP is a minimum required total of five pages in body length. Emphasis is placed on the item areas delineated earlier. The sixth page of the paper lists the resources used. Students must cite a minimum of five sources in their bibliography.

The oral presentation is to be a total of 10-15 minutes. Students select their date for presentation by drawing a date from a hat. This has a positive effect on the student because he selected his own date rather than being assigned a date on which to present. The written papers are to be submitted to the instructor on the date of the oral presentation; however, some flexibility is built into this process.

Both approaches, written and oral presentations are utilized because of the different student talents. Some students are naturally more skilled

in self expression than others. Some students are also more adept than others at written expression. In any event, the two grades (paper and oral presentation) are averaged. Each student is given a fair and equitable chance to meet the objectives of the course and to expand his creativity.

Project Evaluation

Each student and the instructor evaluates every student presentor. The student evaluators fill out the evaluation forms during the presentation. An example of the evaluation form is provided on the next page. While each student is asked to assign a grade to each presentation, the instructor's assessment of the oral presentation is of ultimate importance. However, the instructor does take into consideration the student evaluations. They are particularly important if there is great disparity in the view of the teacher and students. If the disparity exists, the instructor must decide whether or not to compromise.

The name of the evaluator and grade assigned are clipped from the bottom half of the evaluation form and enclosed in the instructor's files. The top half is collated and provided to the student presentor. This approach provides immediate feedback to all presentors from all class members.

Students realize through conversations with the instructor that their grades on the SIP are not determined based on the growth or non-growth as it may be reflected with the pre and post assessment. Instead, students are evaluated based on the degree to which they are able to fulfill the competencies for the project.

Oral Presentation: 15-20 minutes are alloted for each presentation. Ten minutes for class discussion will be utilized between presentations for questions and for filling out an evaluation form on each presentation.

You will receive two grades on your Self Improvement Program. One for the oral presentation and one for the written paper. The two grades will be averaged to determine the final grade for this project. Good luck.

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Topic:_____ Name of Presentor_____

Instructions: Give a check mark for each of the areas discussed in the oral presentation. If you wish to give a higher evaluation in a particular area after the presentor has provided additional information, simply make a check in the desired area which reflects good or excellent.

	Not at all	Moderately	Good	Excellent	General Comments
PURPOSE					
OBJECTIVES					
REV. OF LIT.					
PRE/POST TEST					

General comments related to the quality, style, creativity and substance of the presentation.

Signed by evaluator:_____

Grade you would assign the presentation:_____

Analysis of SIP as IGE

The SIP permits students to expand upon their creativity; to select areas to explore that are of interest to them; to learn at their own pace; to be remediated if they do not meet the objectives of the course and finally students can be re-cycled in this approach to education.

This approach to teaching Cross Cultural Communication has been used quite successfully for five years. Students speak openly about their personal growth and development as a result of their experiences. This approach requires that the student take an active role in his learning. They see the relevance in this approach to education which is holistic rather than fragmented. They also see the relationship of the parts of education to the whole of life and learning. Through the SIP they are encouraged to explore their strengths and weaknesses and to take advantage of instructor guidance to work towards maximizing their potential. Ultimately, students have expressed that this approach to education helps them to feel better about themselves and about their learning experiences.

The SIP is interdisciplinary because the student selects the subject area or the focus area for the research. The teacher must be flexible enough to accomodate the student interests and to facilitate student learning. This interdisciplinary approach to education crosses over subject area lines and offers to the student a more integrated education experience.

Elementary and secondary level teachers may utilize this approach in their classes. Naturally, the process would be more guided by teachers

of elementary school children. While this process would require more teacher-directed time for elementary school children, it would be worth the effort and time involved.

The interdisciplinary teaching/learning approach to education seeks to help students do the following:

.Make connections between what they learn in the various subject areas;

.Learn to accept responsibility for their learning;

.Improve upon the knowledge and skills; and

.Make the all-important relationship between life and learning.

These are goals that are obtainable. Teachers are encouraged to use this approach/process or a modified version of this (SIP) process in their IGE classes to facilitate student learning.